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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT'S LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS EMPOWER KARZAI
OPPONENTS

11. (SBU) Summary: The National Assembly's 2008 leadership elections, in which two deputy speakers and two secretaries were elected from among upper and lower house members, may have further diminished President Karzai's influence in the legislature. While new and independent lower house First Deputy Speaker Mir Wais Yasini opposes ambitious Speaker Qanooni's attempts to control the institution's agenda, only First Secretary Abdul Satar Khawasi openly supports Karzai. Qanooni now holds a three-two majority in the leadership. The upper house could also edge towards becoming an anti-Karzai mouth piece. New upper house First Deputy Speaker Hamed Gailani intends to run for president and has brokered mutual support deals with the rest of the upper house leadership through his new Harmony group.

Lower House Leadership Majority Favors Qanooni

12. (SBU) Lower house Speaker Mohammad Yonus Qanooni and the United Front political group gained a measure of additional power and influence in the 2008 lower house leadership elections. Qanooni now holds a three-two majority in the lower house leadership. In achieving this, Qanooni upset the previously accepted ethnic distribution of the four lower house leadership seats. Members say they prefer a distribution that divides power between Pashtuns and Tajiks while reserving one position for another minority group: first deputy speaker - Pashtun; second deputy speaker - Hazara, Uzbek, or Turkman; first secretary - Pashtun; second secretary - Tajik. With the election of a strong Tajik as

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second deputy speaker, this year's contest equally divided the four positions between Tajiks and Pashtuns, possibly exacerbating the already pronounced Pashtun-Tajik division in Kabul politics.

The Lower House Victors:

13. (SBU) First Deputy Speaker: Mir Wais Yaseni is a Pashtun from Nangarhar province, and an independent reformer. During the 2007 First Deputy race other members considered Yaseni

Karzai's candidate. He led the field until the President announced his support for the eventual winner, Mohammad Arif Noorzai, who is tied to the Karzai family by marriage. Following Karzai's apparent change of heart, Yaseni openly opposed the President throughout 2007. Many members of the assembly now believe Karzai supported Yaseni's 2008 campaign, suggesting their possible rapprochement. Though cautious, Yaseni is more respected and stronger willed than his predecessor Mohammad Arif Noorzai. He may side with Karzai more than Qanooni in 2008, but already is proving to be a strong and independent leader.

¶4. (SBU) Second Deputy Speaker: Amanullah Payman is a moderate Tajik from Badakhshan province with broad appeal in the National Assembly. He is a member of the Jamiat political party and United Front umbrella group. He is also personally close to Qanooni and Rabbani, both of whom supported his candidacy. Though Payman will advocate United Front positions, he may also seek to act as an intermediary with the President. He has previously demonstrated himself a moderate interested in reaching out to Qanooni and Karzai.

¶5. (SBU) First Secretary: Abdul Satar Khawasi is a Pashtun from Parwan province. He is a member of Hezb-e-Islami and closely linked to Farouk Wardak and President Karzai. Khawasi was a staunch Karzai supporter as First Secretary in ¶2007. He will likely continue to support the President's agenda and resist Qanooni's efforts to run the lower house as an opposition operation.

¶6. (SBU) Second Secretary: Dr. Mohammad Saleh Saljoqi is a Tajik from Herat province. Saljoqi is not particularly close to the United Front, but was a member of the Jamiat party - a United Front constituent - and close to Rabbani. Saljoqi will likely support the United Front's agenda in most

KABUL 00000682 002 OF 002

matters; he is not close to President Karzai or the Pashtun parties.

Hamed Gailani Builds Upper House Coalition

¶7. (SBU) While no seats changed hands in the upper house leadership elections, re-elected first deputy Hamed Gailani appears to be working behind the scenes to build his power in preparation for a 2009 presidential run. Upper house members say Gailani has promised speaker Mojadeddi a role in his administration in exchange for the speaker's acquiescence to his deputy's agenda. (Note: Mojadeddi's family is tied to the Karzais by marriage and he is a staunch champion of the President.) Gailani is also backing the other upper house incumbents in an attempt to construct a leadership coalition. Gailani calls his new coalition the Harmony group.

Upper House Victors

¶8. (SBU) First Deputy Speaker: Gailani is a Pashtun from Paktia province. His father, Pir Gailani, garnered one percent of the vote for president in 2004. Hamed Gailani now seems to intend a presidential run. He appears to have attempted to use the leadership elections to build himself a coalition in the upper house. Gailani's coalition does not fall along traditional ethnic or regional lines, however, and upper house members' ethnic and tribal affiliations may ultimately trump a passing allegiance to him.

¶9. (SBU) Second Deputy Speaker: Dr. Burhanullah Shinwari is a Pashtun from Nangahar province. Shinwari has been a strong Karzai supporter in the past. It is not clear if Shinwari has broken with Karzai, or if Gailani's efforts to woo him have caused Shinwari to shift his long-term allegiance.

¶10. (SBU) First Secretary: Mawlawi Aminudin Mozafari is a Tajik from Kapisa province. While Mozafari's political

engagement usually involves religion, he is connected to Tajik warlords and has supported the United Front in the past.

¶11. (SBU) Second Secretary: Abdul Khaliq Hussaini is a member of the Pashai, a small tribe from the Konar/Nuristan area. Hussaini supports Gailani and will seek to forward Gailani's legislative and presidential agendas. Hussaini has also been a strong central government supporter, and it is unclear with whom he would side if forced to choose between Gailani and Karzai.

Upper and Lower Houses May both Challenge Karzai

¶12. (SBU) The National Assembly's upper and lower houses may increasingly resist President Karzai in 2008 as Qanooni and Gailani separately seek to establish their electoral credentials. Both once supported or at least suffered Karzai's government, but now accuse the President of squandering their patronage. Karzai's administration, they say, has failed to address continued insecurity, corruption, and a weak Afghan economy. The two are already using their positions to publicize perceived negative aspects of Karzai's presidency.

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